

§ 725.705

(3) Make arrangements for the direct reimbursement of providers for their services.

(b) *Fund liability.* If there is no operator found liable for the payment of benefits, the Office shall make necessary arrangements to provide medical care to the miner, notify the miner and medical care facility selected of the liability of the fund, designate a person or persons with whom the miner or provider may communicate on matters relating to medical care, and make arrangements for the direct reimbursement of the medical provider.

§ 725.705 Authorization to provide medical services.

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, medical services from an authorized provider which are payable under § 725.701 shall not require prior approval of the Office or the responsible operator.

(b) Except where emergency treatment is required, prior approval of the Office or the responsible operator shall be obtained before any hospitalization or surgery, or before ordering an apparatus for treatment where the purchase price exceeds \$100. A request for approval of non-emergency hospitalization or surgery shall be acted upon expeditiously, and approval or disapproval will be given by telephone if a written response cannot be given within 7 days following the request. No employee of the Department of Labor, other than a district director or the Chief, Branch of Medical Analysis and Services, DCMWC, is authorized to approve a request for hospitalization or surgery by telephone.

(c) Payment for medical services, treatment, or an apparatus shall be made at no more than the rate prevailing in the community in which the providing physician, medical facility or supplier is located.

§ 725.706 Reports of physicians and supervision of medical care.

(a) Within 30 days following the first medical or surgical treatment provided under § 725.701, the treating physician or facility shall furnish to the Office and the responsible operator, if any, a report of such treatment.

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(b) In order to permit continuing supervision of the medical care provided to the miner with respect to the necessity, character and sufficiency of any medical care furnished or to be furnished, the treating physician, facility, employer or carrier shall provide such reports in addition to those required by paragraph (a) of this section as the Office may from time to time require. Within the discretion of the district director, payment may be refused to any medical provider who fails to submit any report required by this section.

§ 725.707 Disputes concerning medical benefits.

(a) Whenever a dispute develops concerning medical services under this part, the district director shall attempt to informally resolve such dispute. In this regard the district director may, on his or her own initiative or at the request of the responsible operator order the claimant to submit to an examination by a physician selected by the district director.

(b) If no informal resolution is accomplished, the district director shall refer the case to the Office of Administrative Law Judges for hearing in accordance with this part. Any such hearing shall be scheduled at the earliest possible time and shall take precedence over all other requests for hearing except for prior requests for hearing arising under this section and as provided by § 727.405 of this subchapter. During the pendency of such adjudication, the Director may order the payment of medical benefits prior to final adjudication under the same conditions applicable to benefits awarded under § 725.522.

(c) In the development or adjudication of a dispute over medical benefits, the adjudication officer is authorized to take whatever action may be necessary to protect the health of a totally disabled miner.

(d) Any interested medical provider may, if appropriate, be made a party to a dispute over medical benefits.

§ 725.710 Objective of vocational rehabilitation.

The objective of vocational rehabilitation is the return of a miner who is totally disabled for work in or around

a coal mine and who is unable to utilize those skills which were employed in the miner's coal mine employment to gainful employment commensurate with such miner's physical impairment. This objective may be achieved through a program of re-evaluation and redirection of the miner's abilities, or retraining in another occupation, and selective job placement assistance.

§ 725.711 Requests for referral to vocational rehabilitation assistance.

Each miner who has been determined entitled to receive benefits under part C of title IV of the Act shall be informed by the OWCP of the availability and advisability of vocational rehabilitation services. If such miner chooses to avail himself or herself of vocational rehabilitation, his or her request shall be processed and referred by OWCP vocational rehabilitation advisors pursuant to the provisions of §§ 702.501-702.508 of this chapter as is appropriate.

PART 726—BLACK LUNG BENEFITS; REQUIREMENTS FOR COAL MINE OPERATOR'S INSURANCE

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AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. 301, Reorganization Plan No. 6 of 1950, 15 FR 3174, 30 U.S.C. 901 et seq., 902(f), 925, 932, 934, 936, 945; 33 U.S.C. 901 et seq., Secretary's Order 7-87, 52 FR 48466, Employment Standards Order No. 90-02.

SOURCE: 38 FR 12494, May 11, 1973, unless otherwise noted.

Subpart A—General

§ 726.1 Statutory insurance requirements for coal mine operators.

Section 423 of title IV of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act as amended (hereinafter the Act) requires each coal mine operator who is operating or has operated a coal mine in a State which is not included in the list published by the Secretary (see part 722 of this chapter) to secure the payment of benefits for which he may be found liable under section 422 of the Act and the provisions of this subchapter by either (a) qualifying as a self-insurer, or